



## **Global Master of Arts Program**

### **Masters Thesis**

#### **Dynamic, Dogmatic, & Divergent:**

How United States Marine Corps Officers Learn the Innovative Art of  
Constructive Rule-Breaking

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## **Executive Summary**

*To date, the United States Marine Corps chapter of history reflects an impressive record of ready, capable, and loyal service to American foreign policy. For 237 years, Marines have demonstrated themselves capable of fighting through chaos and winning when the Nation was least ready. A Marine unit's meaningful progress across that chaotic history has frequently been the product of the commanding officer's ability to innovate, often having to improvise in the face of rules, vice their absence. The warfighting philosophy and decision-making practicum of the six-month Marine Corps officer basic school represents the crucial element in teaching newly commissioned officers that rule-breaking skill. The Basic School accomplishes this by compelling student officers to incorporate the Marine Corps doctrinal system, and then by facilitating progressive experimental decision-making exercises that teach student officers how to recognize and bypass doctrinal inefficiencies without discarding the system altogether. Established Marine Corps Rules, Norms, & Directives provide the officer with timeless structure for sound decision-making, but it is through the progressively fluid, six-month grind of immersive executive experimentation, against the threat of a thinking "enemy" in the field, that a Marine officer learns the key to the art of divergent decision-making: Rules are the first, not final reference in the decision-making process.*

## **DISCLAIMER**

**Nothing that follows should be confused as encouragement for illegal, unethical, or immoral behavior. This paper is about tactical, not ethical expedience, and it assumes as America does, that commissioned officers in the United States Marine Corps have been properly screened and evaluated, and certified as possessing exemplary moral character. Any decision-making construct that knowingly and willingly entertains the crossing of ethical “red lines” has no place in a professional military culture, or this paper.**

## **Acknowledgements**

Humble thanks to my thesis advisor, Professor Richard H. Shultz Jr., a true scholar, mentor, and friend to our Corps. I am also grateful for the gracious assistance provided by the many Marine Corps officers interviewed in this work, especially that kindly provided by Brigadier Generals George W. Smith Jr. and Julian Dale Alford. Every Marine covets the opportunity to be shaped by a truly great leader; I had two. As I prepare to retire from active duty, my hope is that this paper will in some way aid your ability to explain to others what we all know to be true: The Marine Corps wins by relentlessly encouraging the search for a way to win; that way begins with, but often does not end with, the rules. And finally, thanks to my best friend Heidi and to our three wily sons, whose sacrifice and love sustained me across a year of studying in a walk-in closet.

## **Relevance**

### **Purpose**

The primary aim of this paper is to identify the specific elements of United States Marine Corps (USMC) officer training and education responsible for sustaining the organization's well-documented ability to adapt and prevail in complex and uncertain circumstances. As an institution, the USMC has historically avoided explicitly detailing or labeling such processes. This paper attempts to detail specific training and education activities involved in the entry-level development of USMC officers, and to positively align that development with the overall USMC temper for adaptive success.

### **Methodology**

Personal Interviews. The primary sources supporting this paper are personal interviews conducted with fourteen USMC active-duty officers from the rank of Captain to Major General. By the time of my interviews, each of these officers had accrued a minimum of 10,000 hours of direct subject matter experience in the training and education of entry-level USMC officers. In some cases, the interviewees exceeded 20,000 hours of experience as students, instructors, curriculum managers, unit commanders, and organizational commanders directly related to entry-level USMC officer development. Collectively, their living level of professional expertise regarding the subject of this paper is unparalleled.

Literature & Instruction Review. Secondly, the paper reviews and highlights the extensive organizational science literature most relevant to the innovative and adaptive interest, and relates those highlights to the specific activities encompassed in the program of instruction at the USMC basic school for officers.

Case Studies. Lastly, the paper briefly examines two individual case studies that highlight combat decision-making in complex and uncertain environments. Though the case studies do not attempt to draw conclusive cause and effect relationships between training and combat decision-making, they do succeed in providing context to the overall thesis.

### **Key Findings**

- Rules are the first, but not often the final reference in a USMC officer's decision-making process
- The USMC teaches entry-level officers how to situationally appraise and constructively break rules
- USMC officer education involves shifting the decision-making impulse from reflex, to rule, to effect
- Chaotic USMC scenario training often favors effects-based decisions that constructively break rules
- Constructive rule breaking aligns with the overall adaptive and innovative success of the USMC

### **Required Conditions**

- A physically and mentally captive student population
- A professionally expert faculty
- Resources to simulate realistically complex and uncertain scenario-based training

### **Implications**

The key findings of the paper will inform organizations that are reliant on time-driven, opportunistic decision-making, especially where those organizations place great trust in the expertise of individual decision-makers. Independent of the military context, the paper promotes a general decision-making capability that exploits situational discrepancies in relevant rules, norms, and directives. Additional work providing a comparative assessment of the exhibited USMC decision-making construct with those of like civilian organizations might inform improvements in each organization's ability to cultivate more capable decision-making skill in our increasingly complex and progressively uncertain world.



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*You cannot be so focused on getting rules on the books, that you overlook the reality on the ground ~ Richard H. Shultz Jr.*<sup>1</sup>

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Although the majority of the United States Marine Corps (USMC) adaptive reputation was earned through the direct sacrifices of non-commissioned and enlisted Marines, it is the officer corps that bears primary responsibility for the institution's stellar decision-making reputation in and out of combat. If not instinctive, fostering this mindset is not easy. How then are Marine officers taught how/when to break rules? What role might formal training and education play in developing the potential to objectively scrutinize and deviate from standing rules, norms, and directives in order to achieve ideal outcomes in rapidly changing situations? The Marine officer's highly adaptive, creative, and innovative mindset has been widely documented in the literature,<sup>2</sup> but little has been written to identify the constructs employed in the common training and education of USMC officers to perpetuate the Corps' adaptive talent. One such construct is the common decision-making education of Marine officers that takes place at The Basic School (TBS) in Quantico, Virginia.

### **A. THE BASIC SCHOOL**

#### **1. History and Purpose of The Basic School**

First formed in 1898 as the "School of Application," TBS remains unique among the United States Armed Forces.<sup>3</sup> To date, the USMC is the only Force that requires

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<sup>1</sup> Shultz Jr., Richard H., *The Marines Take Anbar: The Four Year Fight Against al Qaeda*, Pg. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Among many others see *Pete Ellis: An Amphibious Warfare Prophet, 1880-1923* by Dirk Anthony Ballendorf; *Maverick Marine: General Smedley D. Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History* by Hans Schmidt; and *Chesty: The Story of Lieutenant General Lewis B. Puller, USMC* by Jon T. Hoffman.

<sup>3</sup> Venzon, Anne Cipriano, *From Whaleboats to Amphibious Warfare Lt. Gen. "Howling Mad" Smith and the U.S. Marine Corps*, Pg. 10.

every new officer to complete a “100-Level” basic officer course before they move on to careers in infantry, logistics, aviation, or any of the 23 Marine officer occupational fields.<sup>4</sup> TBS has always been the place where every marine officer learns the fundamental, almost religious principle of Marine officership: Before becoming a “cook, baker, or candlestick maker,” a Marine officer is first and foremost a combat capable leader of Marines.

Since its inception, TBS has always been a school that places great value on a “trial and error” approach that effects “learning by doing.” Documented evidence of this inclination can be found in course descriptions as early as 1902:

The course at the school is so arranged as to permit the instructor to fully explain the subject matter of each recitation, and then follow such theoretical instruction immediately with practical work, applying the principles just learned. This plan cannot be carried out in every instance, but has been found to produce the best results, and is consequently adopted wherever practicable.<sup>5</sup>

The modern version of TBS has changed drastically in character, but the “learning by doing” nature of the school remains the same. Today, all newly minted USMC officers endure a 27-week mental and physical grind in the forested hills of Quantico, Virginia. During that time they spend 1,607 official Program of Instruction (POI) hours studying USMC tactical doctrine in classrooms, around war-gaming sand tables, and in field training exercises.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. Seeds of Innovation**

As the TBS POI progresses, students are provided direction, then coaching in a controlled field exercise scenario, and finally they are afforded the opportunity to make consequential decisions in an ambiguous and consequential field exercise environment.

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<sup>4</sup> USMC Officer MOS Handbook, [http://www.ososb.com/documents/MOS\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.ososb.com/documents/MOS_Handbook.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *Status Report on The School of Application*, Annual Reports of the Navy Department for the Year 1902, Pg. 980.

<sup>6</sup> The Basic Officer Course Program of Instruction, Pg. 14.

In the uncertain environment, students bear expert individual and collective witness to the punishing failure that accompanies an inability to incorporate tactical doctrine, but they also increasingly appreciate the similarly negative consequences of being too slow, too cautious, or too predictable in tactical execution. The constant analysis of this gap between *Theory and Effect*, or, what is more commonly known in the Marine Corps as *Task vs Intent*, is the primary activity that drives USMC decision-making. Hence, an officer's education at TBS is primarily designed to introduce, encourage, and facilitate the gap analysis between two constant questions: *What is to be done?* and, *What is the most effective way to go about doing it?* Where organizational Rules, Norms, and Directives (henceforth referred to collectively as "Rules") support effective solutions, a student is expected to incorporate them in their tactical plan. However, following a diligent task/intent gap analysis, when a student determines that following established rules will run counter to an effective outcome, the student is expected to assume risk by deliberately diverging from those rules. This constructive rule-breaking potential, cultivated at TBS, is the backbone of Marine Corps innovation.

More Specifically, TBS develops an officer's potential to foster innovation by improvising decisions where rules are either nonexistent, or inept references for producing timely and effective outcomes. Using a *Dynamic, Dogmatic, and Divergent* construct, TBS inspires that decision-making potential. Across the intense, six-month program at TBS, graduates are invested with a constructive rule breaking potential that is highly effective in chaotic and complex environments.

Beyond identifying two relevant case studies as simple illustrations, this paper does not attempt to provide detailed evidence of divergent decision-making in practice

beyond TBS. Changing political climates too heavily influence how the Fleet Marine Force encourages or suppresses the divergent decision-making potential that is cultivated at TBS, and thus must be more fully explored as the subject of another paper.

## **B. ANTECEDENTS**

### **1. Literature Support for Marine Corps Innovation**

The USMC is widely documented to be a highly adaptive warfighting organization with a specific innovative skillset for navigating complexity and managing adaptive change.<sup>7</sup> In *First to Fight: An Inside View of the Marine Corps* (1984), retired USMC Lieutenant General Victor Krulak provides what many consider to be the definitive origins of USMC adaptability and innovative success. *First to Fight* documents the forcing function that imminent combat expectations have played in increasing the adaptive potential of the Corps. Expecting to be first in the fight, and to be immersed in uncertain and complex circumstances, Marines learned early and often how to adapt and overcome chaotic conditions to win.<sup>8</sup> James Warren's book *American Spartans* (2005) goes further to specifically describe how USMC officer "training exercises" indoctrinate new officers with key traits of "adaptability, boldness, and self-criticism."<sup>9</sup> In his book *The Marines Take Anbar: The Four Year Fight Against Al Qaeda* (2013), Richard Shultz conclusively showcases this USMC organizational learning dexterity and the resulting innovative nature of USMC decision-making stating, "Marines learn roles, methods, and modes of behavior to respond to situations marked by ambiguity, uncertainty, and

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<sup>7</sup> Shultz Jr., Richard H, *Organizational Learning and the Marine Corps: The Counterinsurgency Campaign in Iraq*, Pgs. 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> Krulak, Victor H, *First to Fight: An Inside View of the U.S. Marine Corps*, Pg. 137.

<sup>9</sup> Warren, James A, *American Spartans: The US Marines: A Combat History from Iwo Jima to Iraq*, Pg. 20.

unforeseen challenges.<sup>10</sup> These volumes and many others have well documented the USMC as a nimble warfighting organization with an exceptionally storied past.<sup>11</sup>

## **2. Literature Support for Constructive Rule-Breaking**

The study of rule breaking is ancient, but central developments can be effectively threaded through a review of key literature. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), philosopher John Locke explored the value of communicative rules when he wrote that the purpose of language was:

First, to make known one man's thoughts or ideas to another. Secondly, to do it with as much ease and quickness as possible; and thirdly, thereby to convey the knowledge of things. Language is either abused, or deficient, when it fails any of these three.”<sup>12</sup>

Modern literature has its origins in the work of early industrial psychologists. In his book *Psychology and Industrial Efficiency* (1913), Hugo Münsterberg highlighted the requirement for rule specialization, if not diversion, when he stated that organizations regularly faced, “particular prescriptions” that “needed fitting special situations,” which fell outside of more “rigid rules which any one may apply.”<sup>13</sup>

In their pioneering book, *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (1966), Daniel Katz and Robert Khan largely set the foundation for study of constructive rule-breaking behavior through their description of rules as imperfect or incomplete references for organizations. They were among the first organizational scientists to attribute instability to rule-pure organizational decision-making constructs, saying that no organizational planning could foresee or accommodate exigent circumstances, and calling any

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<sup>10</sup> Shultz Jr., Richard H, *The Marines Take Anbar: The Four-Year Fight Against Al Qaeda*, Pg. 3.

<sup>11</sup> For more see *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs) by Stephen Peter Rosen; *Underdogs: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps* by Aaron B. O'Connell; and *Marine Corps Interwar Period Innovation and Implications for the Upcoming Post Operation Enduring Freedom Period* by Jeffery L. Hommond.

<sup>12</sup> Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Pg. 370.

<sup>13</sup> Münsterberg, Hugo, *Psychology and Industrial Efficiency*, Pg. 306.

organization that depended solely on rules “a very fragile social system.”<sup>14</sup> In *Toward a Theory of Organizational Learning* (1977), organizational theorists John Van Maanen and Edgar H. Schein added by suggesting that more sturdy organizations embraced rule flexibility by socializing their members in waves that first included rules, and followed with more flexible constructs, or what they referred to as the “odd nuances” required to accommodate decision-making in remote, transient conditions.<sup>15</sup>

In 1986, Arthur Brief and Stephan Motowidlo first coined the term *Prosocial Organizational Behavior* to describe “ways in which an individual can act spontaneously and voluntarily to promote the organization's interests.”<sup>16</sup> Brief and Motowidlo went on to establish that individuals can equally promote an organization's interests by either following its rules, or by knowingly diverging from them in cases when the rules themselves are not in the organization's best interest.<sup>17</sup>

The value distinction between rules and divergence was developed further in 1990, when Barry Staw and Richard Boettger published a revolutionary paper that investigated the methods by which individuals and organizations learn to evaluate the efficiency of rules. Focusing on a decision-making element known as *Task Revision*, they recognized that organizations committed to goals, vice processes are more likely to promote organizational practices that consistently explore distinctions between customary and effective task performance.<sup>18</sup> Staw and Boettger further proposed that rule-breaking behavior might better accommodate chaotic environments, by first suggesting that rule-

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<sup>14</sup> Katz D. and RL Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations*, Pg. 338.

<sup>15</sup> Van Maanen, John E. and Edgar H. Schein, *Toward a Theory of Organizational Socialization*, Pg. 49.

<sup>16</sup> Brief, Arthur P. and Stephan J. Motowidlo, "Prosocial Organizational Behaviors," Pg. 710.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Pg. 718.

<sup>18</sup> Staw, Barry M. and Richard D. Boettger, "Task Revision: A Neglected Form of Work Performance," Pg. 538.

breaking behavior could provide new perspectives to match ever-changing task conditions or environmental circumstances,<sup>19</sup> and secondly, by placing a premium on the practical speed of experiential, or intuitive decision-making over the delayed precision of purely doctrinal solutions.<sup>20</sup>

In 2006, Elizabeth Morrison built on previous rule-breaking work by introducing the Pro-Social Rule Breaking (PSRB) construct. She defined PSRB as “any instance where an employee intentionally violates a formal organizational policy, regulation, or prohibition with the primary intention of promoting the welfare of the organization or one of its stakeholders.”<sup>21</sup> With PSRB, Morisson draws a very clear and important distinction between violating rules as a means of *shirking*, and violating rules in order to “do things better or to “do good” in the context of one’s organizational role.”<sup>22</sup> More recently in 2010, Parks et al. introduced the theory of Organizational Expediency that incorporates most of the previous rule-breaking literature to define Organizational Expediency as “behaviors that are intended to fulfill organizationally prescribed or sanctioned goals but involve breaking, bending, or stretching known organizational rules, norms, or directives.”<sup>23</sup> This theory suggests that organizations nurture innovative creativity and integrity of purpose when rules governing consequential decision-making remain somewhat “elastic.”<sup>24</sup>

The conclusion of this literature review suggests a positive correlation between decision-making flexibility regarding rules, and effective outcomes. This affinity

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Pg. 537.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Pg. 538.

<sup>21</sup> Morrison, Elizabeth W. “Doing the Job Well: An Investigation of Pro-Social Rule Breaking.” Pg. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Pg. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Parks et al., Pg. 703.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Pg. 718.



increases in step with the chaos and uncertainty of the organizational environment. Thus, it can be concluded that the more flexible a warfighting organization's decision-making approach is to rules, the more effective that warfighting organization is likely to be.

### **C. A SHIFT IN USMC PHILOSOPHY**

Although the USMC has long demonstrated itself as an adaptive organization, major changes in the character of warfare over the last thirty years have evolved to influence greater organizational emphasis on innovative decision-making. During those decades that followed the Vietnam era, a pitch philosophical battle engulfed the USMC officer corps. On one side of the argument were the traditionalists who sought to preserve the good reputation of the USMC by defending its historically more centralized and attritionist form of battle.<sup>25</sup> Opposing them was a rapidly growing group of intellectuals who were proselytizing a more decentralized, highly flexible, maneuver-based battle philosophy. Instead of simply overpowering an enemy, the key aim of this new philosophy dubbed *Warfighting*,<sup>26</sup> was to improve tactical decision-making in order to generate and exploit advantages of time and space that could subdue an opponent quickly, effectively, and economically.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the maneuverists were advocating that the USMC learn to use speed to bypass and out-position opponents they previously would have attempted to methodically destroy.

The intra-organizational battle raged on for more than a decade, but by 1993 the USMC had fully adopted the new maneuverist philosophy and re-tooled its training &

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<sup>25</sup> Wyly, Michael D., "Teaching Maneuver Warfare", in Richard D. Hooker, Jr., (ed.), *Maneuver Warfare: An Anthology*, Pg. 248.

<sup>26</sup> *Warfighting* is also the name of Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication-1 (MCDP-1). First published in 1989, it serves as the primary reference for how the USMC organizes, trains, and fights.

<sup>27</sup> Terriff, Terry, "Warriors and Innovators: Military Change and Organizational Culture in the US Marine Corps," Pg. 222.

education apparatus to better reinforce the core competencies demanded by the *Warfighting* doctrine. The two key components of this training & education reset involved expanding professional military education of all Marines, and developing more open and realistic Field Training Exercises (FTX). The professional education was intended to increase the timeless historical and philosophical foundations of warfare while developing the analytical, critical thinking, and judgment dexterity Marines would need in order to independently react to the increasing complexities of the modern battlefield.<sup>28</sup> The FTX improvement was designed to provide Marine commanders and their troops with freewheeling, force-on-force scenarios where they could test the merits of their schooling and their new maneuver-based doctrine in free play, living experiments. The primary philosophical efficiency of this force-on-force approach was its ability to pit opposing decision-makers and force them to create and exploit advantage against one another in a highly dynamic and uncertain environment.<sup>29</sup> These dualistic processes of educational mastery and living experimentation quickly became keystone concepts across all formal training in the USMC, but no place were they more integrated than The Basic School for new officers.

#### **D. CHANGE COMES TO THE BASIC SCHOOL**

Each year TBS trains more than 2000 newly commissioned second lieutenants from The United Naval Academy, Reserve Officers Training Corps, and the Officer Candidate's School in a common approach to USMC officership. TBS was, therefore, a natural departure point for the USMC's new maneuver *Warfighting* philosophy, and the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Pg. 225.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. For a discussion of a large exercise, see Andrew R. Hoehn, 'Force-on-Force at MCAGCC', *Marine Corps Gazette* 72/7 (July 1988) p.9ff.

forefront of what Major General Stacy Clardy calls the “Quantico Revolution.”<sup>30</sup> Through the curriculum revisions and increased trials of live simulation, new officers would be progressively exposed to the simulated uncertainty of the modern battlefield in order to develop the ability to cope with and eventually excel in the chaotic tempo of maneuver warfare.<sup>31</sup>

Although many of these changes affected the TBS formal Program Of Instruction (POI), over time, normative approaches were what succeeded so superbly at instilling the unique adaptive mindset required by maneuver warfare.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, TBS itself became the grand socialization process of the USMC’s *Warfighting* philosophy, while still managing to facilitate the fusing of various assumptions, ideas, and identifying beliefs associated with overall USMC organizational culture.<sup>33</sup> The overall enculturation process at TBS is momentous, but most important to this paper are the various activities that have shaped the modern TBS program to better enable rule-divergent decision-making.

In essence, *Warfighting* has influenced TBS to evolve into a decision-making factory. ***Capable leadership, physical capabilities, and exemplary character decided***, the contemporary focus of TBS is to produce officers trained for independent and effective decision, communication, and action in an ambiguously complex, or “wicked” environment. Officers learn that comfort in chaos is something to be aggressively shaped,

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Major General Stacy Clardy, USMC.

<sup>31</sup> Terriff, Pg. 236.

<sup>32</sup> Katzenstein, Peter J., *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military Power in Postwar Japan*, Pgs.18–19.

<sup>33</sup> For an overall review of applicable organizational culture see:

Deal, T., & Kennedy, A. E. *Corporate Cultures*. (1982) Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, Peters, T. J., & Waterman, R. H. *In Search of Excellence*. (1982) New York: Harper and Row, and Tichy, N. *Managing Strategic Change: Technical, Political, and Cultural Dynamics*. (1983) New York: Wiley.

not awaited. TBS teaches the time-honored USMC tradition that rules are important, but imperfect, and that the hallmark USMC flexibility and adaptability of individual decision-making is born of concept, vice any particular rule. Hence, student officers learn that rules serve as worthy foundations, but not as proscriptive structures to guide all decisions. In this approach rests an overall acceptance that calculated deviations from rules are often required to generate optimal outcomes in the grip of chaos.<sup>34</sup> In his book *Corps Business* (2000), David Freeman isolates this idea even further:

What sets TBS apart however, is that it unabashedly eschews imparting specific skills in favor of breeding generic, high-speed, chaos proof leadership...TBS drives home the critical Marine belief in the necessity of individual styles of management and of bold, innovative decisions.<sup>35</sup>

Across six-months of time and circumstance, TBS gradually and deliberately manages student officer progression through this *Dynamic to Dogmatic to Divergent* decision-making continuum. End result: A USMC officer with the innovative potential to understand that rules are the first, not the final reference in the decision-making process.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Clancy, Tom, Anthony C. Zinni, Tony Koltz, and Robb Webb, *Battle Ready*, Pg. 142.

<sup>35</sup> Freedman, David H., *Corps Business: The 30 Management Principles of the U.S. Marines*, Pg. 68.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Cunningham, USMC.

## II. THE TBS DECISION-MAKING CONSTRUCT

### *DYNAMIC-DOGMATIC-DIVERGENT*

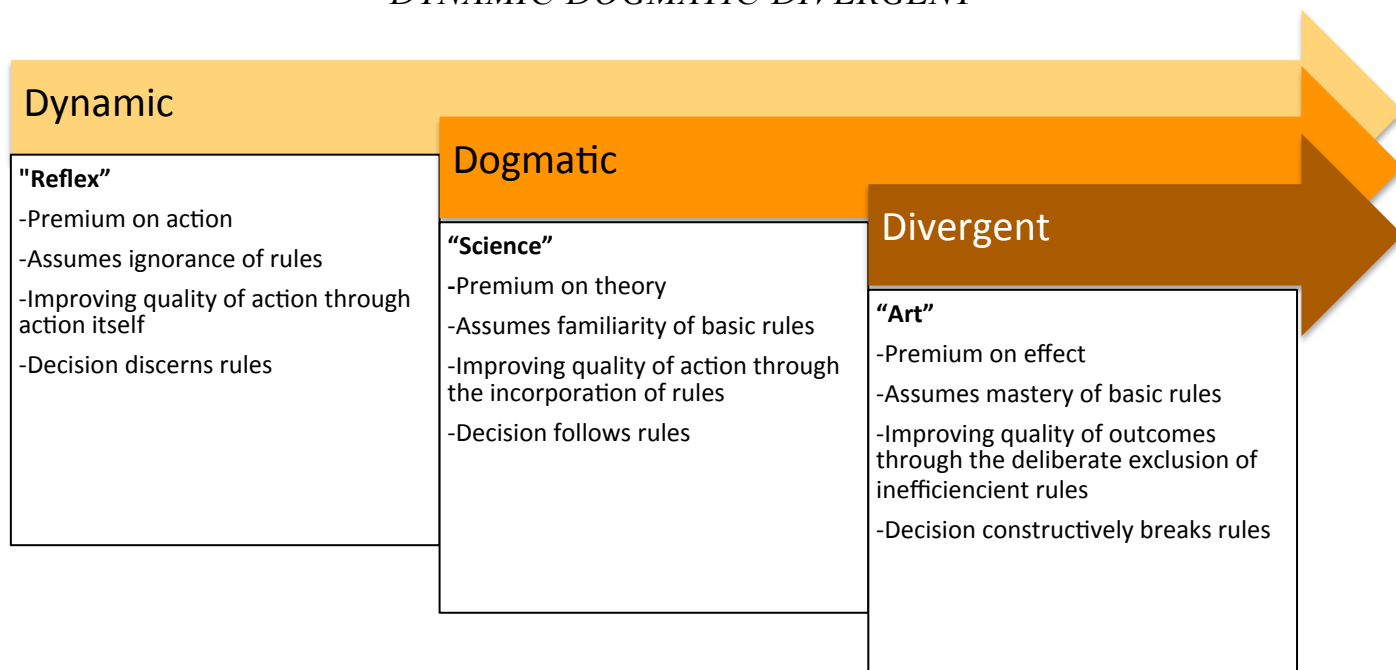


Figure I

### A. THE DYNAMIC COMPONENT

*In case of doubt, Attack! ~ George Patton*

#### 1. A Bias for Action

From the first days of TBS, students are introduced to the USMC bias for speed over accuracy that has defined military success for millennia.<sup>37</sup> They learn that in the chaos of war, time does not support perfect planning, or sometimes any planning at all, and that rapid, bold decision-making often outweighs methodical calculation. A new officer's initial instinct is to delay a decision in a desperate search for any clarity that might improve informational advantage and lead to a more comprehensive solution. Early on, TBS deliberately denies a student this luxury of time through a succession of

<sup>37</sup> "Speed is the essence of war. Take advantage of the enemy's unpreparedness." Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Griffith, S. B., Pg. 85. Like *On War*, *The Art of War* should be on every Marine officer's list of essential reading. Short and simple to read, *The Art of War* is every bit as valuable today as when it was written about 400 B.C.

decision-making “failure drill” scenarios. Through these experimental drills, students are plunged into hypothetical scenarios and abruptly coerced into rapid decisions.<sup>38</sup> Then, in USMC tradition, the outcomes of those decisions are put on public display for evaluation, comment, and open criticism.<sup>39</sup> During the initial iterations the often-fretful student role players are disoriented and embarrassed, but they soon settle and accept the historical maxim that a timely/ignorant plan is often superior to a tardy/intellectual one.<sup>40</sup> As one instructor notes, “It gets the students used to critiquing each other, makes them more self-aware, that their plan isn’t the only plan and we are professionally responsible enough to critique each other and make a better plan next time.”<sup>41</sup> In this regard, the officer is introduced to a the Clausewitzian concept that ultimate success in chaos is more about the combined timing/quality of a *series* of decisions, vice the simple quality of one isolated decision.<sup>42</sup> Moral: Chaos forgives a poor decision far faster than a failure to make one.

Through these early failure drills, students learn that improving initial circumstances in chaos actually requires very little information. In other words, when you find yourself buried by chaos, the preliminary key to survival is to start digging in all directions in search of feedback. You will often not be moving closer to the intent of your original mission, but at least you will be actively attempting to alter the circumstances that threw you in the hole. As former TBS Instructor and Company Commander Major Alton Warthen states:

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<sup>38</sup> “If they’re asked a question, they have to respond, as opposed to just sitting and listening.” Captain Maureen Bell quoted in Marine Corps Times article, *TBS Goes Hardcore*, Pg. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Warren, James A., *American Spartans: The U.S. Marines: A Combat History from Iwo Jima to Iraq*, Pgs. 13, 20.

<sup>40</sup> Von Seeckt, Hans *Thoughts of a Soldier*, Pg. 12.

<sup>41</sup> Captain Maureen Bell, USMC, *TBS Goes Hardcore*, Pg. 24.

<sup>42</sup> “War does not carry in itself the elements for a complete decision and final settlement.” Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Howard, Michael and Peter Paret, Pg. 119.

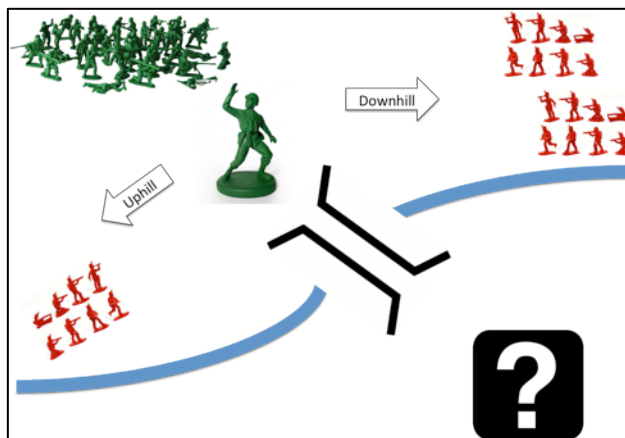
I don't remember a damn thing about the beginning; I just remember how I felt." I felt like I could be thrown deep into any ocean and I would at least be capable of finding my way back to the surface." I just need to start swimming, then start thinking, then start navigating. Asking myself, what does good look like? "Am I closer to intent, endstate, or final result desired...or are things at least better than I first found them."<sup>43</sup>

This value on blind action is also grounded in the vast literature on Organizational Behavior,<sup>44</sup> with particular emphasis on the stabilizing value of immediate action coming from the work of Karl Weick, who states: "Once people begin to act, they generate outcomes in some context, and this helps them discover what is occurring, what needs to be explained, and what should be done next."<sup>45</sup> The interim result at week three or four of TBS is a student officer who has internalized a key maxim of combat survival: No decision is the worst decision of all.

## 2. Dynamic Tactical Example

For an example of decision-making in the dynamic test, consider the following:

A student is told that enemy forces are moving on his platoon and told to choose among



three possibilities:

1. Attack downhill against a known enemy position 2/3 the size of his platoon
2. Attack uphill against a know enemy position 1/3 the size of his platoon
3. Use a nearby bridge to move his platoon to a better position across a river where the enemy position is unknown.

The scenario is constructed such that

each of the three choices carries a unique, but equal risk for the student. However, the

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Major Altom Warthen, USMC.

<sup>44</sup> For more on OB, look at John B. Milner's *Organizational Behavior 3*, an edited volume showcasing the pioneering OB work of Elton Mayo, Chester Barnard, Kurt Lewin, Mary Parker Follett, Max Weber, Henri Fayol, and Frederick Taylor. Miner, John B. *Organizational Behavior 3. Historical Origins, Theoretical Foundations, and the Future*. M.E. Sharpe, Ebook Library <http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=435242>.

<sup>45</sup> Weick, Karl, *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Foundations for Organizational Science, Pg. 55.

longer the student postpones a decision, the more the risk increases, until finally the student is left with no survivable choice. A scenario like this might be delivered well before a student has been introduced to doctrinal fundamentals related to terrain elevation, proportional combat power, or the dangers associated with bridge crossings and unknown enemy disposition. Tactical Result: Unimportant. The importance of the drill is not the tactical outcome of the choice, but rather the ability to simply make a choice in a time-compressed and information poor tactical scenario for which the student has received no formal training.

## **B. THE DOGMATIC COMPONENT**

*Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist ~ Pablo Picasso*

Just as student officers are learning to dynamically make decisions and act in absence of formal training or doctrine, they are also being crushed with the limited, but weighty TBS inventory of rules. As previously stated, USMC doctrine is authoritative, but it is not directive so much as it is general guidance to be tempered by wisdom.<sup>46</sup> *Warfighting* itself describes the USMC concept of doctrine as a “philosophy for leading Marines in combat, a mandate for professionalism, and a common language.”<sup>47</sup> While Marines do not promote exhaustive, rigid doctrine, they have zero tolerance for officers incapable of mastering the limited amount that is prescribed. The TBS staff is fond on saying that USMC tactical rules are written in the blood of Lieutenants and Captains who have gone before. They are often quoted as saying “Learn from their mistakes; don’t repeat them.”<sup>48</sup> Former chief instructor of TBS, Lieutenant Colonel Clint Benfield underscored the importance of a doctrinal foundation, and the relentless pressure TBS

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<sup>46</sup> United States Marine Corps, *MCDP-1: Warfighting*, Pg. 56.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Fick, Nathaniel, *One Bullet Away: The Making of a Marine Officer*, Pg. 36.



places on student officers to demonstrate mastery:

Doctrine may not be what we are about, but it underpins everything we do. Once exposed to the doctrine, student officers are expected to incorporate and exhibit it in all their subsequent decision-making. The ones who take that task lightly get a rude awakening. Before an officer attempts to take one step outside of the box, they'd better clearly demonstrate that they know its dimensions and what forces shaped it. Without that knowledge and discipline, officers aren't creative...they're recklessly ignorant.<sup>49</sup>

## **1. Towards a Common Dogmatic Language**

Besides being an officer's dogmatic decision-making foundation, tactical rules are also the utility that places diverse personalities of an officer cohort on the "same sheet of music." This communal development is a key facilitator of decision-making. As the students begin to "think alike," they begin rapidly and effectively framing tactical problems for collective analysis and recommended solutions.

The vast majority of the doctrinally "rigid" subjects covered at TBS are delivered in the first three months of the six-month program. In the more mechanical, subjective subjects related to weapons and technical data and description, students are required to demonstrate mastery on written and practical application examinations. In the more calculated, objective subjects related to critical thinking, tactical planning, and dogmatic decision-making, students are required to demonstrate mastery on written tests *and* on tactical evaluations of their live performance in classroom and Field Training Exercises (FTX).

The first two of six FTXs at the school focus on the squad (13 people) and Platoon (41 people) level. Moving into the forest without any return to the barracks, these FTXs are essentially weeklong "failure drills" with a primary goal of allowing the students to demonstrate and refine their grasp of the newly introduced doctrine.

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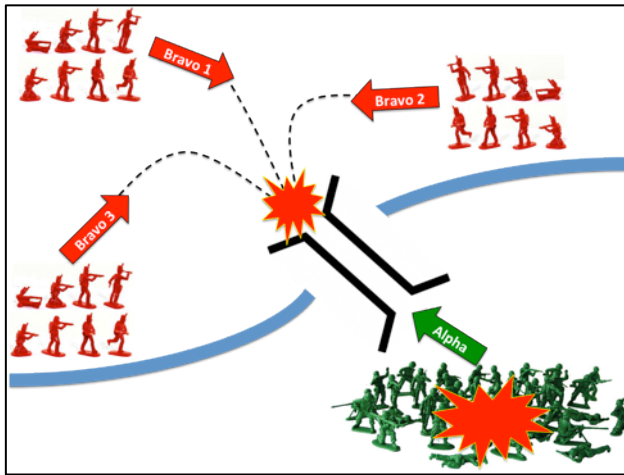
<sup>49</sup> Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Clinton Benfield, USMC.

Conservative scenarios and highly structured game-play serve as guides for these first two weeklong evolutions in an effort to canalize and evaluate the dogmatic components of a student's decision-making capacity. All decisions and subsequent outcomes are systematically reduced, reconstructed, reviewed and actively discussed by the instructors and students across the entire weeklong evolution. Decisions that incorporate the instructed tactical rules repeatedly prosper; those that demonstrate tactical incompetence typically fail.

Two things are woven very conspicuously through the doctrinal mass at TBS to prepare student officers for their continued progression through the decision-making continuum: 24 hours of formal classes and discussions on USMC decision-making theory, and the consistent use of USMC case studies, discussion groups, and decision games that highlight the USMC's highly adaptive and innovative tradition. Unlike the hard science of the doctrine they complement, the decision-making classes are highly theoretical, designed to consistently place the tactical rules in context with the overall USMC *Warfighting* philosophy. In similar fashion the case studies provide the student officers with undeniable contextual evidence to support the merit of the rules, through epic stories of legendary Marines who financed the dogma with their lives. The interim result at month three is a doctrinally sound, self-compelled decision-maker with increased potential to take meaningful action in an uncertain and time competitive environment. Ingrained with dynamic instinct and dogmatic utility, the student officers are individually prepared to begin the second, crucial half of TBS.

## 2. Dogmatic Tactical Example

For an example of decision-making that succeeds or fails to incorporate the elements of doctrine, consider the following example:



Two student platoon commanders are opposing each other in a scripted field exercise. Both are given a simple tasking order to tactically cross a bridge. In her plan, student Bravo incorporates TBS instructed rules guiding the crossing of a bridge (a

linear danger area) by dividing her platoon and preparing one squad to cross at a time, while the others provide security. Student Alpha's plan does not incorporate linear danger rules instructed previously in the TBS POI, as he recklessly allows his platoon to mass while he prepares to rapidly cross them and attack student Bravo all at once, without posting security. No more than a squad of student Bravo's platoon is under threat of fire at any given time during the bridge crossing, while every member of student Alpha's platoon is at risk during the entire evolution. Tactical Result: While preparing to cross the river, Student Alpha's entire platoon is wiped out by a single mortar attack prosecuted by student Bravo.

## C. THE DIVERGENT COMPONENT

*Hell, there are no rules here, we are trying to accomplish something!* ~Thomas A. Edison

### 1. Introducing Divergence

In actuality, TBS begins to immerse student officers in the analysis of constructive rule breaking on day one. Before the students are even formally introduced

to their staff or one another, they participate in class B2B2357, which is entitled *Decision-Making Foundations, Decision-Making Tactical Decision Game (TDG)*.<sup>50</sup> This TDG is designed to first demonstrate to students the gap that often exists between tactical tasks and the intent underpinning them. The setup for the TDG appears to be a straightforward task of destroying an enemy base, but students quickly learn that merely accomplishing the tactical task leads them to fail the intent of the overall mission (defend their base). Given a task to destroy the enemy base, students fail when their fixation on the enemy base prevents them from properly defending their own. It is a very disconcerting experience for many students, but one that sends them down a path of constant gap analysis between task and intent. The resulting analysis of variance is a clear example of the revision that Staw and Boettger argued was necessary to insure tasks were both “relevant and realistic” in view of the overall mission they were designed to accomplish.<sup>51</sup> Though the students are far from prepared to begin making divergent decisions, the seed planted with the day one TDG remains: If a task carries proscribed rules that prevent the timely and meaningful accomplishment of its underlying intent, then those rules are inept in context and should be refined, replaced, renegotiated, or simply violated in pursuit of a more ideal outcome.

## **2. Nurturing Divergence**

As discussed in the dogmatic section, the first two FTXs at TBS are based on highly conservative and structured scenarios, with a primary goal of allowing the students to demonstrate and refine their grasp of the newly introduced rules. In stark contrast, the last four FTXs that occur in the second half of TBS are designed to be progressively more

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<sup>50</sup> TBS POI, Pg. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Staw & Boettger, Pg. 553.

fluid and reactive to student decisions, with a primary goal of forcing students to explore the limits of rules in an environment of ever increasing tempo and uncertainty. Where before, decisions that incorporated the instructed rules repeatedly prospered; a constant default to rules during FTXs can produce failure. These increasingly “free-play” exercises offer student officers an opportunity to make decisions and win or lose by those decisions. In the later months there is considerably less driving the student to certain locations or prompting them to follow prescribed timelines and courses of action. The fluid nature of the exercises make them much more difficult to manage (greater reliance on instructor skill), but the fluidity offers many more divergent opportunities where students are characteristically “forced to make creative decisions with limited time and insufficient information,” and where they are “driven to adapt to rapidly changing, chaotic situations.”<sup>52</sup> In free-play, students are forced to think quickly and creatively against a living, breathing enemy trained with a like mind, and an equal desire to win. Immersed in this highly chaotic and competitive atmosphere, students repeatedly arrive at decision points that either do not respond well to a rule-compliant solution, or require time-dependent/situation-dependent divergence from those rules in order to produce constructive outcomes that are consistent with the overall intent of their mission.

### **3. Gauging Divergence**

The Tactical Billet Evaluation Form (TAC-EVAL) is the principle instrument used by TBS instructors to record a student officer’s decision-making performance.<sup>53</sup> Though the form is advertised as a leadership and rule evaluation tool, the precedence and verbiage of its construction clearly focus it on measuring a student officer’s full-

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<sup>52</sup> TBS Staff, *The Basic School’s New POI: The Impetus for Change*, Pg. 18.

<sup>53</sup> For an example TAC-EVAL see Appendix A.

spectrum decision-making capacity. Of the five observable components of the TAC-EVAL, rules (in the form of Tactical/Technical Proficiency) are listed last. The only element of the entire two-page evaluation that actually lists the word “rule” is the association with standard operating procedures required to safely and effectively command troops in tactical execution. Results, not Rules are the focus of the TAC-EVAL of the student officer. The student officer’s ability to integrate rules into decisions is absolutely accommodated and recorded, but the TAC-EVAL is clearly designed to place the instructor’s focus on assessing and reflecting the student’s ability to make, communicate, and manage the execution of effective decisions. Specifically, the instructor’s focus is on judging a student officer’s bias for decisive action, decision-making that calculates and weighs consequences, as well as the student’s decision-making tolerance for fog/friction/chaos. Thus, the liberal nature of the rubric purposefully forsakes the specific process mechanisms of a student’s tactical plan in order to facilitate the measure of his overall *effectiveness*. Quite simply: Did his plan work? These liberal circumstances produce great insight into the divergent potential of the student, but managing that liberal evaluation process requires an absolutely expert guide.

#### **4. Guiding Divergence**

Competent guidance through all phases of TBS is important, but the divergent component requires absolute expertise. Success in this regard is owed to the quality of the Staff Platoon Commanders (SPC) and the Assistant Instructors (AI) of the TBS staff. Among the larger staff, the SPCs and AIs have the primary responsibility for teaching, mentoring, and shaping the decision-making potential of student officers. To even be assigned to the TBS staff means that these captains have undergone a screening process

that has determined them to be among the very best company grade officers in the USMC.<sup>54</sup> Having achieved mastery of organizational rules, and demonstrated professional competence in and out of combat, these USMC captains provide expert and reasoned escort to TBS student officers. As noted, most instructors are cut from similar cloth, but it should also be mentioned that instructor nuances naturally influence the speed and quality with which a student officer becomes comfortable and proficient in divergence. The greater the degree to which the SPCs and AIs facilitate free play, the more the divergent potential will be cultivated in the student. All students eventually demonstrate some level of divergent potential before graduating from TBS, but a team of upright SPCs/AIs and enthusiastic students form a more profound and durable capacity.

## **5. Showcasing Divergence**

The culminating FTX at TBS is known as “The War.” The exercise can accommodate up to five distinct phases over an 8-day period, but the only required phases for a given student class to complete are the first and fifth phase; the other three phases are entirely dependent on events that result from student decision-making. As a result, each student class has a drastically unique and, therefore, unpredictable experience during the TBS War. Some classes progress straightforwardly through all five phases, where others might only get through the mandatory two. Moving from phase to phase relies almost solely on the students and their ability to effectively decide, communicate, and maneuver against each other in the field. Student decision-making literally drives the action. Instructors issue basic tasks and intent to student leaders and supervise student safety, but they are rarely privy to the location of the opposing student units, the overall

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<sup>54</sup> TBS Organizational Brief, Slide 2 notes.

play of the problem, or other information that might allow them to drive the exercise towards a certain resolution.

The war is the most fluid environment created in the entire six-month course, and it requires students to maintain a high decision-making and operational tempo, at the rapid expense of rules. However, as long as the student leaders can demonstrate to the instructor their clear understanding of applicable rules, and that their divergence is designed with a higher operational aim, the exercise wheels keep turning. There may be reminders of rule considerations, but instructors typically will not stop the game play unless safety becomes a concern. The true arbiter is the sum of the decisions, communications, and actions being produced by the living, thinking enemy on the other side of the forest. Students find themselves to be winners and losers on both sides of those decisions, and besides the tactical consequences, there are real life incentives and punishments in play. Former TBS instructor and Company Commander Major Kevin Walsh explains:

The exercises have plenty of ‘it pays to be a winner’ type stuff in them. Following the exercises, the winners of an engagement often fly by helicopter or ride by truck over the tens of miles back to the barracks, while the losers hike. Overall, the students operate against each other in a dynamic and competitive environment in which creativity and risk-taking are rewarded when they result in sound decisions and disciplined execution.<sup>55</sup>

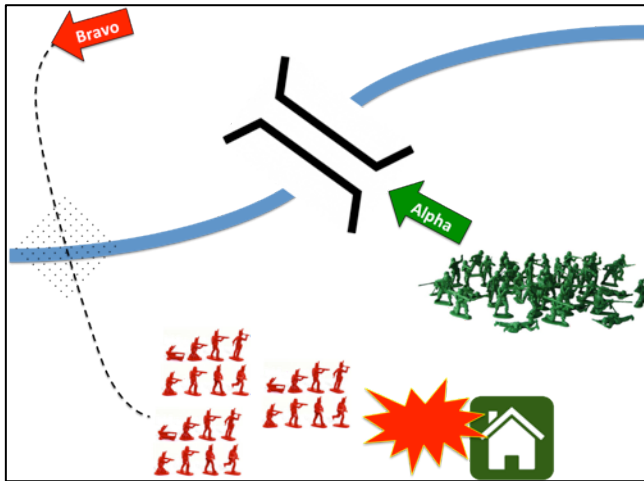
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<sup>55</sup> Interview with Major Kevin Walsh, USMC.



## 6. Divergent Tactical Example

For an example of decision-making that demonstrates divergent potential, consider this exercise scenario that might play out during the TBS War:



Two student platoon commanders are opposing each other. Student Alpha is given an order to have his platoon secure a bridge, with the intent to keep student Bravo's platoon from crossing a river and attacking Alpha's base. Student Bravo is given

an order to have her platoon secure the same bridge, with the intent to cross the river and attack student Alpha's base. When student Alpha's platoon arrives at the bridge to find it unoccupied, he contently issues a faultless doctrinal plan to secure it. When student Bravo's reconnaissance team informs her that student Alpha's platoon has already arrived at the bridge and is preparing a textbook defense, she makes the divergent decision to disobey her order to secure the bridge, and instead locates a uses a shallow fording site down river to cross her platoon in route to an uncontested and highly successful attack of student Alpha's base. Student Alpha's rigid adherence to his task prevented him from accomplishing its original intent, whereas student Bravo's decision to disobey her task actually produced the outcome the task originally intended, and hence was a good example of constructive rule breaking. Lesson: Student Bravo found a way to win.

As soon as a TBS scenario reaches a natural end or culminating point, the real learning begins. As in the previous, more dogmatic field exercises, immediately following a scenario, TBS instructors sometimes take hours to insure that all decisions and subsequent outcomes of decisions like the one in the above example are systematically reduced, reconstructed, reviewed and actively discussed between the instructors and students across the weeklong FTX evolution. This analytic process insures that all students are exposed to the value behind both the constructive, divergent innovation demonstrated by student Bravo, and the rigid lack of curiosity demonstrated by student Alpha. Through the assessment, the students continue to internalize the maxim that rules matter, but in the chaos of combat, hastily securing survival, advantage, and victory might come at their expense.

## 7. Towards a Common Divergent Philosophy



Following months immersed in the trial and error of rules, framed in the context of historic case studies and intertwined with intuitive decision-making theory, the charm of innovation begins to take hold. The student officers collectively begin to recognize a philosophy of Marine officership that is wholly inaccessible to those on the outside. Social psychologists call this awareness *Reflexivity*, a theory of organizational evolution marked by collective questioning, reviewing, evaluating, debating and adapting that enables the reflection of what has already taken place to intuitively shape events to come.<sup>56</sup> In organizations constantly defined by chaotic and uncertain operational environments, this

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<sup>56</sup> MacCurtain, Sarah et al., “The Top Management Team, Reflexivity, Knowledge Sharing and New Product Performance: A Study of the Irish Software Industry,” Pg. 221.

informal, communal sense making is fundamental to success.<sup>57</sup> As student officers begin to commune in these essential decision-making construct theories, they are said to “deduce from it an appropriate rule to govern any possible decision, thus producing a very elegant and complete form of control.”<sup>58</sup>

It is important to re-state that this common philosophy would miscarry without the TBS crawl-walk-run approach of the dynamic, dogmatic, and divergent construct. The divergent potential and the common innovative philosophy are the proper ends of the step-by-step process that first insures the decision-making impulse, then introduces, directs, and coaches the tactical rules, and finally facilitates repetitious and consequential assessment of those rules in a fluid exercise environment that assesses and reveals their situational strengths and weaknesses.

**The final result desired is an implicit marine officer philosophy: Rules are the first, not final reference in the decision-making process; where rules fall short, diverge from them and innovate a winning solution.**

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<sup>57</sup> Levitt, Barbara and James G. Marsh, *Organizational Learning*, Pg. 327.

<sup>58</sup> Ouchi, William G., *Markets, Bureaucracies, and Clans*, Pg. 26.

### **III. CASE STUDIES**

#### **A. MAJOR GENERAL STACY CLARDY – IRAQ, 2003**

##### **1. The Context**

Major General Stacy Clardy's divergent decision point occurred during the period that American forces invaded Iraq in 2003. At the time, Clardy was a Lieutenant Colonel in command of the USMC's 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, a calvary-type unit that often served as the Commanding General's "eyes and ears" in the lead unit of all Marine forces attacking north during the infamous "March Up."<sup>59</sup> Having received reports of American POW sightings throughout their movement North through Baghdad and beyond, Clardy's battalion received yet another POW report on the morning of 13 April, 2003. While occupying a blocking position in the town of As Samarra, local Iraqi leaders provided credible information that American POWs captured earlier in the conflict were being held in a local house.

##### **2. The Decision**

At the time, Clardy was operating under multiple rules that prohibited him from unilaterally executing a POW rescue mission. First of all, Samarra was a holy city and considered off-limits to US forces.<sup>60</sup> Secondly, at the time of the POW report Clardy was under orders from his chain of command to depart Samarra and move 30 miles north in support of a larger Marine attack on the town of Tikrit.<sup>61</sup> Thirdly, Clardy's unit was not a

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<sup>59</sup> West, Francis J., and Ray L. Smith, *The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division*, Pg. 275.

<sup>60</sup> McCollough, J. E. "Seven Nightingales." <http://rhinoden.rangerup.com/sevennightingales/>.

<sup>61</sup> Gordon, Michael R., and Bernard E. Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq*, Pg. 503.

special forces unit, and was not trained in hostage rescue.<sup>62</sup> And lastly, Clardy was unsuccessful in contacting his chain of command in order to seek their guidance/authorization on an attempted rescue. Combined with the fact that the POW location information provided to Clardy was unverified, the rule factors prohibiting a rescue attempt were significant. However, Clardy was certain that the window of opportunity for a rescue was closing, and that his decision had the potential to save the lives of the POWs. With that outcome in mind, Clardy knowingly and willingly diverged from the standing rules and authorized his unit to execute a rescue mission. As one of the Marines on the rescue states, the decision carried great personal risk for the participating Marines, and even greater professional risk for Clardy, “If we had been played by our sources, if there was an ambush waiting for that platoon, Clardy’s career would probably be over. He knew it. He sent his Marines in anyway.”<sup>63</sup>

### **3. The Upshot**

The intelligence turned out to be accurate, and Clardy’s Marines swiftly and effectively rescued five members of the Army’s 507<sup>th</sup> Maintenance Company, and two downed Army Apache helicopter pilots, all captured three weeks earlier in the conflict.<sup>64</sup> Based on the positive outcome, Clardy’s actions have been widely reported in the literature as heroic, but they mask enormous elements of chance. Operating in a “dynamic and fluid environment,” far from the certain success of any decision, Clardy knowingly and willingly broke rules for the mere possibility of an ideal outcome.<sup>65</sup> As one of the liberated POW’s Shoshana Johnson said, “if the Marines had hesitated, taken

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<sup>62</sup> Warren, *American Spartans*, Pg. 339.

<sup>63</sup> McCollough, “Seven Nightingales.”

<sup>64</sup> Warren, *American Spartans*, Pg. 339.

<sup>65</sup> *POW Rescue, a Year Later*, CBS News, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/pow-rescue-a-year-later/>

the time to clear their operation through channels, what might have happened to us?...Of course, if the rescue had been compromised, Clardy and his Marines would have been held to account. But they had seen an opportunity and they took it.”<sup>66</sup>

## **B. CAPTAIN JOSHUA WADDELL – AFGHANISTAN, 2011**

### **1. The Context**

Captain Joshua Waddell’s divergent decision point occurred during a combat deployment to Afghanistan in 2011. At the time, Waddell was a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, and second in command of a USMC infantry company from 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, tasked with fighting the Taliban in and around the village of Sangin.<sup>67</sup> On the morning of November 1, 2011, Waddell was acting commander of the company while his Captain was away on patrol with another platoon. With the company having two days earlier suffered a triple amputee casualty to an explosive devise, Waddell and his team were carefully monitoring the area outside of their base for insurgent activity. After using a camera to discover a group of local men placing explosive devises in a nearby tree line, Waddell positively identified the leader as a known hostile and ordered one of his sniper teams to shoot him.<sup>68</sup> The sniper team engaged and wounded the insurgent, but before Waddell could dispatch a foot patrol to capture him, several members of his group commandeered a farm tractor from a nearby orchard and attempted to escape. Killing the insurgent was the original aim, but the wounding forced Waddell to consider the potential

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<sup>66</sup> Johnson, Shoshana, and M. L. Doyle, *I’m Still Standing: From Captive U.S. Soldier to Free Citizen-- My Journey Home*, Pg. 208.

<sup>67</sup> Carter, Sara A. "Marine's Career Threatened by Controversial Rules of Engagement." <http://washingtonexaminer.com/marines-career-threatened-by-controversial-rules-of-engagement/article/167369>

<sup>68</sup> Memorandum from the U.S. Marine Corps on Command Investigation into the Facts and Circumstances Surrounding the Engagement by Scout Snipers, referenced in Jeffrey F. Addicott, "The Strange Case of Lieutenant Waddell: How Overly Restrictive Rules of Engagement Adversely Impact the American War Fighter and Undermine Military Victory," Pgs. 24-25.

intelligence benefit of the insurgent's capture, as well as the potentially greater negative consequences of his recovery and inspired return to the battlefield.

## **2. The Decision**

At the time, Waddell was operating under rules that prohibited him from the indiscriminate employment of fires. The tactical directives governing all US forces in Afghanistan required battlefield commanders to presume all persons and property on the battlefield to be civilian until "otherwise apparent."<sup>69</sup> As Waddell could not positively identify the insurgent's rescuers or the ownership of tractor, the "otherwise apparent" condition of the tactical directives had not technically been overcome, and the rule factors prohibited further fires into the area. However, like Clardy, Waddell was certain that the window of opportunity for capturing the wounded insurgent was closing, and that his decision had the future potential of improving overall security conditions in Sangin, and of saving the limbs, if not the lives of his Marines. With those outcomes in mind, Waddell knowingly and willingly diverged from the standing rules and authorized the sniper team to shoot out the engine block of the tractor being used in the escape. The decision carried limited risk for the civilian lives and property in the target area, but represented tremendous professional risk for Waddell. Waddell gave his snipers a green light, and they fired a perfect shot that ripped through the tractor's engine block and immediately disabled it.

## **3. The Upshot**

None of the Afghans in the target area were injured by the shot. However, after abandoning the tractor, the group proceeded to escape with the injured insurgent through

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<sup>69</sup> *COMISAF's Tactical Directive*, Pg. 2.

[http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/docs/20111105%20nuc%20tactical%20directive%20revision%204%20\(releaseable%20version\)%20r.pdf](http://www.isaf.nato.int/images/docs/20111105%20nuc%20tactical%20directive%20revision%204%20(releaseable%20version)%20r.pdf)

the nearby orchard before Waddell's dispatched foot patrol could arrive in the area. Waddell then purposely held fire on the dismounted group to minimize collateral damage.<sup>70</sup> Subsequent intelligence reports confirmed that the insurgent later died of his wounds. Based on the outcome, Waddell's actions might have easily been characterized as sound, but further investigations into Waddell's decision and actions resulted in disciplinary proceedings that attempted to force his discharge from the Marine Corps. Waddell's battalion commander officially relieved him of duty for a "violation of [combat rules] during an engagement that placed noncombatant local nationals in the area of direct fire and resulted in a damaged local national vehicle."<sup>71</sup> Operating in an environment of tremendous personal risk and uncertainty, Waddell knowingly and willingly broke rules in pursuit of an ideal outcome for his overall mission and his Marines. As a result of Waddell's decisions, explosive attacks in the company area of responsibility in Sangin dropped dramatically. Ultimately, Sangin villagers benefitted from a more secure and stable environment, and Waddell's own Marines could credit the series of his decisions with restoring the reasonable measure of security to his unit that had been stripped away by excessive rules of engagement.<sup>72</sup>

### **C. CASE STUDY CONSIDERATIONS**

*An idea that is not dangerous is unworthy of being called an idea at all ~ Oscar Wilde*

Though many factors of time and circumstance certainly influenced the divergent skill exhibited in these two cases, the potential for that skill is certainly in harmony with the common divergent philosophy developed at TBS. Having himself served on the TBS

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<sup>70</sup> Memorandum from the U.S. Marine Corps on Command Investigation into the Facts and Circumstances Surrounding the Engagement by Scout Snipers, referenced in Jeffrey F. Addicott, "The Strange Case of Lieutenant Waddell: How Overly Restrictive Rules of Engagement Adversely Impact the American War Fighter and Undermine Military Victory," Pg. 26.

<sup>71</sup> Carter, "Marine's Career Threatened by Controversial Rules of Engagement."

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.



staff, Major General Clardy certainly draws a clear line:

My experiences at TBS (as a student and instructor) created the basis of my leadership and tactical decision-making abilities. To execute our Warfighting philosophy we need exceptional warfighters. The philosophy relies heavily on small unit leadership initiative (following mission-type orders) to overcome the fog and friction of war. I am convinced that the success of the Marine Corps is a direct result of our foundation and focus on junior leadership, professional competence, and Warfighting philosophy.<sup>73</sup>

The context and outcomes of the two case studies differs greatly, but each officer's potential for divergent decision-making is clearly demonstrated in both. Clardy and Waddell both determined that certain elements of the rules they were operating under (theory) would prevent them from effectively satisfying the intent of their respective missions (effect). In each case they willingly abandoned those more restrictive elements in order to shape conditions closer to intent of their overall mission. It is important to highlight from these case studies that the certainty of the successful outcome did not drive their respective decisions. Clardy and Waddell diverged from their respective rules because they believed that alternative courses of action provided the most likely, not certain, chance of success. The art of the decision is defined by the calculated risk associated with the divergent pursuit of the outcome, not the outcome itself. It is less important that Clardy's outcome was judged more successful than Waddell's. What matters is that both officers demonstrated the capacity to diverge.

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with Major General Stacy Clardy, USMC.

## **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

USMC success can be attributed to a focus on outcomes, vice theories. This culture of effectiveness begins with the professional development of USMC leadership, in particular the decision-making responsibility entrusted to the officer corps. Since 1898, TBS has shouldered the responsibility for training and educating newly commissioned USMC officers in the innovative art of decision-making. TBS provides an expert doctrinal education that requires student mastery, but its great institutional talent remains its capability to develop conflict decision-makers who are inclined to identify and bypass inefficient and overly restrictive rules that prevent ideal results; put another way, Marine officers actively acquire innovative skills by learning how to constructively break rules.

The subject matter experts, academic sources, and case studies exhibited in this paper support the dynamic, dogmatic, and divergent decision-making construct in practice at TBS, and its consequential potential that rebuffs definitive theories for definitive effects. Collectively, the indoctrination clearly establishes that rules should be the first, not final reference in a Marine officer's decision-making process, a conclusion that supports the argument that the divergent potential invested at TBS underpins the overall innovative spirit of the United States Marine Corps.

### **Acronyms**

USMC	United States Marine Corps
TBS	The Basic School
POI	Program of Instruction
MCDP-1	Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (AKA <i>WARFIGHTING</i> )
PSRB	Pro-Social Rule Breaking
RNDs	Rules, Norms, & Directives
TDG	Tactical Decision Game
FTX	Field Training Exercise
SPC	Staff Platoon Commander
AI	Assistant Instructor
TAC-EVAL	Tactical Billet Evaluation Form

## Appendix A

### I. Tactical Billet Evaluation Form

<b>Name:</b> 2ndLt Example	<b>Company Platoon:</b> Alpha, 1st Platoon	<b>Billet:</b> Squad Leader
<b>AI:</b> Capt Instructor	<b>Event:</b> FFEX-I (Night)	<b>Date:</b> 1 April 2005

**I. Decision-maker:** officers should be able to recognize and articulate pros and cons of every decision they make, and understand the decision in terms of its actual or potential consequences. The purpose is to develop a bias for action that, in combat, will make the difference between success or failure in many circumstances.

Unsatisfactory	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Outstanding
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

⇒ **Tactical Planning/Preparation (METT-T Analysis/Combat Order/Detailed Planning):**

- SNO had some room to make decisions even in the face of a relatively restricted live fire range.
- Night attack order was presented with good terrain models that showed both the map and the objective area in greater detail.
- SNO demonstrated a good understanding of the order's format and constructed a detailed Frago.
- SNO is perceptive. SNO applied a discussion of the different possibilities for employing the 203s for illumination in his own plan and latched on to information presented by the AI earlier in the day.
- SNO identified a purpose for his illumination in addition to a purpose for his indirect fires. He also went through an illumination plan in his coordinating instructions.
- He neglected a signal plan because he wished to leave it the same... no one recalled what it had been earlier in the day. He also had his rehearsals in reverse order in terms of the most important (actions on the objective) being last.
- The order represented a cohesive and thought out tactical decision.

⇒ **Bias for Action/Execution Phase (Decisiveness in a Changing Situation/Risk Assessment):**

- Decisions throughout the dry run were rapid and appropriate.
- During the dry run assault, SNO ranged behind his base unit. Most of the squad was more focused on the illumination plan overhead than on execution. Weather conditions prevented the actual live fire execution.

**II. Communicator:** The ability to communicate effectively is an integral part of being a competent and effective officer; it enables the officer to put a decision into action. Instructors will consider the officer student's communications skills when determining leadership abilities and potential.

Unsatisfactory	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Outstanding
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

⇒ **Order Delivery (Command Presence/Confidence/Comfort Level-Presentation/Forcefulness/Poise):**

- Delivery of order was effective if not efficient. SNO displayed some command presence and appeared comfortable issuing an order to his peers, but he paced back and forth across the terrain model the entire time. This pacing served to be distracting.
- SNO interacted with the terrain models correctly. Good walk the dog and task breakdown on the terrain model when issuing his order, but he became awkward when no cards for units were to be found. Walk the dog can be done with cards with or without unit numbers for the appropriate walk the dog. For instance "three fire teams on line (can of dip, magazine, and a MRE spoon—or whatever) all anonymous... Those same objects in Tasks become more specific. "1<sup>st</sup> fire team... you're the can of dip..."
- SNO elaborated numerous times during the order, which detracted from his efficiency in completing his order.

⇒ **Execution (Directive-ness/Implicit & Explicit Communication/Control):**

- SNO communication on the dry run was effective and employed a basic signal plan revolving around voice (no pyro was available for training signals) and hand/ arm signals.
- SNO was able to mix and effectively apply implicit and direct verbal communication in the control of his assault.
- SNO utilized solid ADDRACs on contact with the enemy as well as during enemy counter attack

**III. Executor/Warfighter:** The ability to evaluate information, develop a plan of action, issue an order, and organize/lead a tactical unit for combat. Leaders are expected to perform under stressful conditions, thrive on chaos, overcome fog and friction, and adapt to ever changing situations.

Unsatisfactory	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Outstanding
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

⇒ **Mission Accomplishment (Initiative/Application of Maneuver Warfare/Organize & lead):**

- Dry execution went fair most likely due to the challenging wind and illumination situation.
- Fire and movement was good throughout and had the benefit of the previous day attacks to build on.

**IV. Leader/Commander:** The ability to lead others in the performance of unit tasks and objectives, organize resources, plan effectively, and supervise thoroughly. Students are evaluated for their selflessness, determination, and results. Command involves the application of rules and regulations to execute their duties fairly and effectively.

Unsatisfactory	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Outstanding
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

⇒ **Leadership Effectiveness (Character/Leadership Traits & Principles):**

- SNO displayed excellent command presence in a tactical and live fire environment.
- SNO set the example, led with motivation, energy, and capped off his order with a solid dry run illuminated attack
- Had the range continued, SNO would have been able to demonstrate more leadership skills.
- It is interesting to note that earlier in the day SNO was a vital part of the terrain model generation. SNO motivated his crew and was engaged in personally leading by example to complete the terrain models as rapidly as possible.

**V. Tactical/Technical Proficiency:** Officer students must demonstrate leadership skills and potential in tactical situations. For the purpose of evaluating leadership, the student's ability to transform classroom instruction and assigned readings into a plan of action will be thoroughly evaluated.

Unsatisfactory	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Outstanding
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

⇒ **Mastery/Competency of the POI Material (Comprehension & Application of the POI) :**

- Solid understanding of the combat order and fire support plan.
- Work on orders delivery and further study of the nuances of the combat order will serve SNO well for future use.

### Overall Leadership Performance:

Unsatisfactory	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Outstanding
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

⇒ **Overall Character & Leadership Summary (Compare to peers & Address strengths/weaknesses):**

- SNO has good decision-making, hands on leadership, and sound technical proficiency for this stage of the POI. Some key areas indicate a communications weakness when in the spotlight. All considered he is still above the expected level at this stage of the POI.

SNO Signature and date \_\_\_\_\_

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